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# The Purlieu Letter. Toward a Hegelian Theory of Conditioning

*Frank Ruda*

“In him, connection is not a matter of unbroken transition [Übergang] but a matter of sudden change [*Umschlag*], and the process takes place not through the moments approaching one another but through rupture.” (Adorno)

“The later spirit is that it knows what the earlier was.” (Hegel)

## *1. Some Like It (Too) Late*

How to know when it is too late? It seems it can hardly get any more trivial than this. Just look at the clock, obviously. Check the appointment, check the time and there you go. If you are too late this means, as the English expression goes, you are not on time. But what if it were not so easy to find the right clock? With the previous empirical procedure, we can easily determine objective belatedness, within the framework of objective and objectively measurable time. But this method does not give us the means to determine all sorts of delay. What if some things happen within the framework of objective history that then and only belatedly can be registered and thought and worked through elsewhere? What if this means there could be a kind of structural belatedness even regarding or within objective time? How to measure

such a lag if it were to precede all temporal registers? Does such delay necessitate another kind of chronometer, an absolute kind of knowing that would be able to bridge the gaps of time? Is this what absolute knowing was always about: knowing when it is really or rather absolutely too late?

The famous Hegelian account of philosophy's constitutive belatedness can, as is more than well-known, be found in the *Vorrede* or *Vorwort*—Hegel uses both terms—to his *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>1</sup> It can be found in the discourse that precedes the beginning of the proper philosophical discourse. If the *Vorrede* is structurally placed before the book that it prefaces, what is said about philosophy in it must be said structurally too early or pre-philosophically. Hegel begins to close the preface of the *Philosophy of Right* by stating: “But it is time to close this preface [*Vorwort*]. After all, as preface, its only business has been to make some external and subjective remarks about the standpoint of the book it introduces” (Hegel 2008, p. 16). This is what Hegel states right after he uses the (in) famous owl of Minerva image and thus after he indicates that philosophy begins when “a shape of life has grown old” (ibid.). It seems that as soon as one records that philosophy always comes too late, it is immediately time to close that which precedes philosophy. When one states that philosophy always comes too late, it seems the right time to begin with philosophy. If philosophy comes too late, it seems its very own belatedness can only be addressed from outside of philosophy or too early. There seems to be a paradox here: if philosophy always comes too late, it seems to come too late to say that it comes too late and hence there is no philosophical way to say anything about philosophy's belatedness. Maybe philosophy can even only realize too late what philosophy is. Does it realize too late what it is to come too late?

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<sup>1</sup> *Vorrede* is used in the table of contents and as title of the preface, *Vorwort* is used at the end. I will return to this almost immediately. Cf. Hegel 1986, pp. 4, 11, 27

Philosophy, this seems clear, comes too late. It comes structurally so late that it could never admit to this on time. It is therefore constitutively *Nachwort*, epilogue, unavoidably postscript. After the preface is the obituary — *nach der Vorrede der Nachruf*. Philosophy is not the language of the young and living, but of the old, of the almost dead or of those who are no longer alive but who still need to be understood and, in this sense, still have something to say; of those *die nach uns rufen*, who are, and maybe silently, calling out to us. Philosophy as *Nachruf*, as epilogue is then not silent, but it speaks the language of what is at the end of its life, of the life grown old: it is the language of old men — and one should here remember that Hegel's nickname from when he was in the Tübingen seminary was precisely that: the old man. So, he might have learned this language already rather early in his life. Philosophy's language therefore might ultimately even be the language of the cripple.<sup>2</sup> Philosophy is thus not simply reminiscing about how great it was before, when there was no philosophy. Philosophy is not — or maybe not only — the cigarette after, but the word, the calling after the act, it is *Nachwort*, *Nachruf*, or *Nachrede*. The *Nachrede* which might also describe philosophy's status — a term that literally means postface in the sense in which the preface is the *Vorrede* — is used in the German language as a noun only in the sense of libel, ill-speech, as üble *Nachrede*, slander or defamation.<sup>3</sup> But if philosophy has a relation to slander, this is less the case because it itself would be the speaking ill about the preceding historical discourse, act or deed after whose end philosophy begins its flight. It rather seems to be linked to the

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<sup>2</sup> Adorno remarked somewhere that one can even see efforts of thoughts manifesting in the deep wrinkles in Hegel's face on some of his portraits. From here one might find an obvious connection with the old man in Beckett's work (just think of *Krapp's Last Tape* for example).

<sup>3</sup> One can use it as a verb and then it means that one repeats acoustically (*nachreden*) what someone else said, so it presents us with a discourse that redoubles what precedes it. It is like an echo of its precedent.

very practice of philosophy itself. It is a practice attracting üble *Nachrede auf den Nachruf*, slander about philosophy's status as epilogue, always coming late.

It is like a less funny version of the famous joke cited by Lacan about my fiancé who is never late because the moment she is late, she is no longer my fiancé. Philosophy is always too late, because the moment it is not too late, it would no longer be philosophy (for example, journalism or politics). Already the early Marx derived from this a desire for philosophy to arrive on time. But timing is nevertheless a defining criterion of philosophy. It must arrive on time, but its time is too late. All of this is obviously complicated by the need for philosophy to miss the right appointment and not the wrong one. In coming too late, even though this might sound surprising, there is always a wager involved: the wager that decides that now the time is ripe to punctuate the world with an intervention, because a shape of spirit has grown old. Sometimes shapes of spirit might look younger and more alive than they are and some old shapes might drag on forever, even though their time has already come.<sup>4</sup> This may amount to a complex way of waiting in the centre of philosophy's proceedings, but it may also remind us of Hegel's depiction of the dialectics of sense certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where every attempt to grasp the "now" in the "now" just leads us to an endless process of missing the "now" and thereby an insight into a pre-structural belatedness of empirical temporality itself.<sup>5</sup> The wager of philosophy is that it is now the right time for it to arrive too late.

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<sup>4</sup> This is an argument that can easily be applied to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* itself, for which it can be claimed that it can only depict the state it depicts because this very state has grown old and is about to disappear (and the book also ends with the transition into world-history). In Žižek's words: "Robert Pippin noted that, if Hegel is minimally consistent, this has to apply also to the notion of State deployed in his own *Philosophy of Right*: the fact that Hegel was able to deploy its concept means that dusk is falling on what readers of Hegel usually perceive as a normative description of a model rational state" Žižek 2016, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hegel 2018, pp. 60–8.

## 2. *Biographies of the Afterlife*

Ernst Bloch insinuated that one can compare philosophy's operation to that of a detective—something not foreign to Freudian psychoanalysis—since the latter also always comes after the crime.<sup>6</sup> In this image it is the crime, even if and maybe especially when there is no corpse and when it is hard to detect if something happened at all, that brings the detective onto the scene. Philosophy also seeks to detect what truly happened. Therein it may often be unclear what the crime is. Some may, with Brecht, just identify it as the founding (or perhaps more adequate these days, the bailing out) of a yet another bank. Philosophy, due to its belatedness, has always been a rather disastrous crime-preventer. But this ought not lead anyone to believe it to be the ultimate criminal in the vein of Popper and the like. Adorno famously begins his *Negative Dialectics* with a claim addressing philosophy's present temporality. He argued that the only reason why there still is philosophy is because it came so late, it even missed “the moment” to be “realize(d)” (Adorno 2007, p. 3). After missing an appointment, it really should have attended, it began leading a strange afterlife, a *Nachleben*. Now, it must come to terms with the problems newly created by missing its own realization. Therefore, it must “ruthlessly criticize itself” (ibid.). Philosophy's only task is to offer a critical account of its own failure not to fail, whereby ultimately philosophy stops being philosophy and turns into critical theory. Philosophy came too late, whereby it is led to perform its own funeral of which it as the sole survivor now has to mourn that philosophy never did what it never could. This is what Cioran once called an original mourning (Cioran 1992, p. 31).

This is not Hegel's position. Neither is philosophy a criminal doing the deed, nor is it the supposed hero that turns out to be a

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<sup>6</sup> Bloch therefore claims that the detective novel (as philosophy) has “the crime [*Untat*] as something that already happened still outside of it, before it, it blurts out with the corpse [*fällt mit der Leiche ins Haus*].” Bloch 1985, p. 254.

crippled disappointment. Hegel claims that “philosophy in any case always arrives on the scene too late to give it” (Hegel 2008, p. 16). “It” here being “instructions as to what the world ought to be” (ibid.), “das Belehren, wie die Welt sein soll” (Hegel 1986, p. 27). Philosophy does not arrive early enough to offer prescriptions of how the world out to be or what to do. But it must draw a line of demarcation, namely between what seems to be and what truly *is*. This does not mean—as a Heideggerian would argue—that it aims to conceive of the truth of being (even though, in Heidegger, *Dasein* also always comes too late<sup>7</sup>). It rather means that philosophy’s task is to think being from the perspective of truth or the absolute. And the latter’s time is that of constitutive belatedness, of the delay. Whenever philosophy seeks to give instructions and solve problems, this expresses a rather problematic understanding of the relation between philosophy and actuality. Philosophy shall aim at the “*comprehension [Erfassen] of the present and the actual*” (Hegel 2008, p. 13), but when it tells people what to do, it takes the present to be “something vacuous [*ein Eitles*] and looks beyond it with the eyes of superior wisdom” (ibid., p. 14). When philosophy does not comprehend the present-actual, it begins too early and cannot but help to speak about and aim at a “beyond, supposed to exist” (ibid., p. 13). There are right forms of coming too late and certainly coming too early does not seem an option either. Timing is thus of the essence.

The moment philosophy arrives on the scene too early its proposals are projected into an eternal future, always to come. Instruction-giving falls prey to “the vanity of superior wisdom [*die Eitelkeit der Besserwisserei*]” (Hegel 2008, p. 14; Hegel 1985, p. 26). Arriving too early comes with the temptation that one already has all (knowledge) one needs, but this is, obviously,

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<sup>7</sup> And in the notorious conversation with the *Spiegel*, he claimed: “philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavor.” Heidegger 1981, p. 57.

premature. It will then never end to claim things for which it will never be late enough to realize them. There must always come a better crisis. It is like a conversation in which philosophy is the only one talking. To grasp “the eternal which is present” (Hegel 2008, p. 14), it must discriminate between what is and what is not (in truth). Against philosophy turning into premature and empty wisdom chatter, Hegel’s allows the “things themselves [to] speak in a philosophy that focuses its energies on proving that it is itself one with them” (Adorno 1993, p. 6). Philosophy must come too late to avoid voiding its own discourse in advance.<sup>8</sup> When it gives instructions and converts, when it *belehrt und bekehrt*, it concedes to a problematic form of dogmatic religion — and something similar happens when it takes the present to be the only measure that counts. As one of the rather amusing reviews of the *Philosophy of Right* introduces into one of Hegel’s famous formulas: nothing is “verkehrter” (Anonymous 1973, p. 465), nothing is more wrong, or more inverted, or upside down, or perverse “than to expect from a philosophical writing that it constructs a state how it *ought to be*.” It “can only show how the state, the ethical universe, should be understood” (Hegel 2008, p. 15). Philosophy is a demonstration of a way of understanding the realm of objectivity. But to do so philosophy needs its proper distance: philosophy must therefore operate at a distance from the state (of things). This implies that philosophy can easily fail to be philosophy — and this is part of the history of previous philosophy.

### *3. Revolutionizing*

Starting to paint the grey in grey always implies a wager. It might always happen that philosophy starts painting too early. If philosophy provides a grasp — *eine Fassung* — of its time in the

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<sup>8</sup> Since otherwise it only produces empty promises that it can never fulfill. This is what in Hegel’s account happened with Kant. Cf. Ruda 2018.



form of thought, as the famous adage goes, the wager concerns this very time, namely that it reached an end, that one can get a hold of it. “There is no right time or ‘ripe time’ for revolution (or there would be no need of one)” (Comay 2011, p. 7). When things are too ripe and decaying, it is time for philosophy. “The Revolution always arrives too soon (conditions are never ready) and too late (it lags forever behind its own initiative)” (ibid). Has Hegel’s philosophy inherited this paradoxical temporality from the French revolution? Rebecca Comay read Hegel’s *Phenomenology* so that it depicts all possible ways in which one can attempt to ward off a revolution, Kantian philosophy being one of those attempts (Ibid., pp. 81ff). For Hegel who never gave up on his commitment to the French Revolution—despite his fundamental critique of the terror—it cannot be a surprise that philosophy is conditioned by the revolutionary untimely temporality:<sup>9</sup> always at risk of arriving too early, never knowing in advance, when precisely it is too late. This, again, is no surprise as Hegel already early on identified Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* as a “revolution in the system of ideas” (Hegel 1984, p. 35) but insisted—in line with Schelling and Fichte—that it needs a radicalized continuation, a *Fortgang*.

Hegel’s philosophy is conditioned by the revolution. What follows is an attempt to examine what precisely this means. As Jean-Claude Milner claimed, “in classic French, each mutation in human affairs could be called a revolution, if it is about medicine, politics, literature or each other field of activity” (Milner 2016, p. 76): This includes even the planetary orbit that (recall Polybius) stands for stability. But the revolution that Hegel’s thought is conditioned by is one that obviously breaks with natural cycles. Michael Theunissen noted that in Hegel’s account of religion, which is itself placed in the centre, e.g., in the position of the copula in absolute spirit (e.g. art, religion, philosophy), Christianity

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. the extraordinary text by Hamacher: Hamacher 2006.

was revolutionary (Theunissen 1970). Hegel himself remarked “that nowhere are to be found such revolutionary utterances as in the Gospels” (Hegel 1991, p. 345). Christianity thereby, as Slavoj Žižek has also shown repeatedly throughout his oeuvre, provides not only the form of revolution in the sphere of religion, so that God is ultimately nothing but the collective practice of the community of believers, it also offers a template that structures all kinds of operations of spirit—which is why it is crucial that religion stands in the position of the copula. Wherever it copulates, there is religion. And religion stands in the midst of spirit only revolving around itself. Theunissen: “Hegel understands Christianity as the pervasive centre—*Mittelpunkt*—and in no way as isolated point of passage. From the centre, Christianity radiates into the beginning and end of the whole development” (Theunissen 1970, p. 94). Christianity is revolution in the form of religion. It is revolutionary because it is for Hegel the religion of the dissolution of religion, the religion of the end of religion, atheistic religion, as it were. He therefore also calls it the “great turning point” (Hegel 1973, p. 517).

#### *4. Thought-Revolution*

Hegel’s thought is conditioned by revolution, meaning he thinks from the perspective of the revolution. But this does not mean that thinking is constantly thinking *about* revolution nor that there was a revolution *in* our ways of thinking. Rather it means to revolutionize what we mean by thinking, whereby thinking must itself revolutionize what it means to think thinking. This does not mean that a political revolution is over-determining Hegel’s thought, as if there were a subterranean politicality in it. Rather it means that if Hegel’s thought is conditioned by the revolution this can neither mean that it takes the revolution as content nor as form alone, but that revolution becomes the way of relating

form and content and thus of thinking itself. This implies that all concepts in Hegel must be conceived of from the affirmative point of view of the revolution.<sup>10</sup> In the *Logic* the high conceptual demands of this become clear already when Hegel elaborates the concepts of “something” and of “the other” and “of othering” as something that then confronts us with concerns about how (not) to remain identical in a process of differentiation.<sup>11</sup> If one can read this just as one example of what it means to conceive of revolution as a way of thinking, we are in this case—because it is the *Logic*—talking about a revolution that even precedes time and is pre-phenomenal, but that nonetheless creates a new world of its own.

Hegel thinks from the standpoint of the revolution and creation of novelty. But this also means to conceive of the problems and “dead branches” (Badiou 2009, p. 10f.) revolutionary creation runs into, of the resistances it cannot but produce and of the repetitions (good or bad) that enable or hinder its unfolding. His perspective is that of the immanence of truths, of the immanence of the revolution. This unavoidably implies that even counter-revolution or resistance to revolution is part of thinking—one must in this sense always also think Kant’s philosophy warding off the revolution from the standpoint of revolution, as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*. One must think from this standpoint, as this standpoint is the only standpoint of thinking: “the whole transition [*Übergang*]*—*from the older to the newer times—turns around this—the revolution in the world” (Hegel 1986, p. 158); a revolution so novel, that “never since the sun had stood in the firmament and the planet revolved around him had it been perceived that man’s existence centres in his head, i.e. in *Thought*, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality” (Hegel 1991, p. 466).

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hamacher 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hegel 2010, pp. 83ff.

But if Hegel's thought is conditioned by the revolution, how to read Hegel's comment that has been brought to mind by others before about the present status of the French Revolution? He indicates that it is strangely still too early for philosophy to comprehend what it is conditioned by and that it poses a problem for later generations to solve. In the following, Hegel's remark will be elucidated by turning to what I want to call the German debate about Hegel and the French revolution. It means returning to two classical texts, one by Joachim Ritter, the other by Jürgen Habermas. I will demonstrate in what way both present unsatisfying solutions regarding philosophy's status vis-à-vis the problem that is the revolution.

### *5. The Revolution as Problem*

Almost at the end of his *Philosophy of History*—and thus by implication, at the end of history—one finds one of the few passages in which Hegel talks about the future. This passage is located in Hegel's discussion of the French Revolution and the crucial problem is brought forth, namely that it put into practice and operated such a purified and thus abstract form of freedom that it “allows no political organization to be firmly established” (Hegel 1991, p. 473). The concept of freedom put into practice by the French Revolution confronts the thinker and the world with a problem. This problem is the problem of organization: how to organize the equality of the free—and this means of everyone—when it is by definition impossible to exclude anyone in advance from participating and one must persistently sustain and reproduce the *equaliberty* (Balibar 2014) of all its members? The revolution has undone any assumption of natural inequality by spiriting away also any assumption that there are any shared given natural properties, except that everyone can be killed and is hence mortal. The French Revolution thus posed a problem and

this problem *is* the way its persistent actuality appears. How to organize freedom, collectively? The French Revolution persists as a problem and this is why “agitation and unrest are perpetuated. This collision ... this problem is that with which history is now occupied” (Hegel 1991, p. 473). Against the background of philosophy always arriving too late, this is a surprising claim: history is now, in the present occupied with the problem that is the French Revolution. And it is this problem “whose solution [history] has to work out in the future” (ibid.). History after the revolution is conditioned by the problem that is the revolution and remains under its spell unless it finds a solution.

This is the verdict of a philosophy that tries to come appropriately too late. It can now only acknowledge that what there is, is a persistent, as yet unsolved problem. But the problem is not only a problem for history. It is also a problem for philosophy since it directly pertains to the main concept of (Hegelian) philosophy: freedom. Some aspects of this problem can be pointedly reconstructed by recourse to what Walter Benjamin termed destructive character—which also implies a specific interpretation of freedom. It “knows only one watchword: make room [*räumen*]. And only one activity: clearing away.... For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age” (Benjamin 1999, 541). The destructive character tries to rejuvenate when it is too late. Hegel’s name for this destructive aspect is fanaticism which “recognizes in all Dasein a limitation and wants to destroy it to be free, it is...only the greatness of destruction measures the greatness of freedom” (Hegel 1974, p. 113). The French Revolution revolutionized the understanding of freedom, liberated it from all given and thus not freely chosen determinations. But it got stuck in revolutionizing. Like a compulsion to revolutionize that therefore ultimately became destructive and in self-negating, destructively restorative. But to avoid falling back to the position of common sense one must see therein more than just destructive negativity. Because otherwise one sees in it, similar to what one

would see in speculative thought, “only... its nullifying activity [*Vernichten*]; and even its nullification is not visible in its entire scope” (Hegel 1977, 102f).

The problem that is the revolution is how to think the revolution, how to think the revolution in a revolutionary way. The problem is thus already how to organize thought such that it really thinks the revolution (so thinking the revolution is a problem that concerns the *Logic* of thinking). We are thus here not only encountering a problem vis-à-vis a general concept, but rather one that pertains to the practice of the concept (of freedom), a problem of its *Vollzugsweise*, its performative or affirmative realization. How to think and, therefore, organize the concrete universality of singular and singularly collective freedom affirmatively? The problem of organization is thus a question of how to stabilize the revolution. It is what Žižek so insistently (Žižek 2006, p. 157) called the problem of the day after; how to make the revolution last without ending in an endless compulsion to revolutionize or betray its very principles?

## *6. Conditioning: The German Debate*

The relation between Hegel and the French Revolution has been commented on endlessly. There are many affirmative, negative and critical accounts of this relation. One that is systematically interesting in the present context is the account offered by the rather liberal conservative German philosopher Ritter. He argued that the reason of the revolution is for Hegel identical to reason as such. This is to say, a historical event can embody reason tout court, which is what “is encountered [in Hegel]...for the first time in the history of philosophy [because he] equates traditional metaphysical theory directly as such with knowledge of the age and the present” (Ritter 1986, p. 39f). Hegel’s philosophy is rigorously modern, because it is inherently nothing but a theory of time,

of its own time grasped in thought. Thereby it cannot but raise the question of what constitutes its present and this is especially pressing when traditional answers of how to conceive of one's own time—romantic or naturalistic ones—became problematic. Hegel is the first who attempted to think history historically, in him “the present has emancipated itself from the philosophical tradition” (ibid., p. 41). That he witnessed the French Revolution during his lifetime is even better for the facts. “For Hegel, the French Revolution is that event around which all the determinations of philosophy in relation to its time are clustered, with philosophy marking out the problem through attacks on and defenses of the Revolution. Conversely, there is no other philosophy that is a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel” (ibid., p. 43).

Hegel is the philosopher of the revolution. He is the philosopher of the revolution as an unfinished project, as ongoing. The revolution constitutes modern time and, according to Ritter, is what must be thought to be a true contemporary. But it is ongoing as a problem. A problem that is constitutive of history as the search for its solution is what drives history forward. This is why Ritter speaks of the revolution as a “new era [*Zeitwende*]” (ibid., p. 50), as a temporal turning point, and Hegel refers to it as “the nodus [*der Knoten*]” (Hegel 1991, p. 472), where history stands. This knot, the English term is even more fitting than the German, not yet untied, not yet unravelled, it is a knot not unknotted. Unknottting the knot is the task and maybe one should risk claiming that Hegel's thought because of this knot in general resolves around unnot-ting the not? The (k)not is what makes history, what history must shoulder. It must cut the knot, follow the strings, and more concretely solve the problem immanent to the political realization of singular collective freedom (that is therefore proclaimed a universal right). Even in its problematic form, as Ritter argues, Hegel defends the revolution against all restorative tendencies: it is an event, already because going back

behind what it achieved even in failing cannot but appear regressive. But Ritter suggests that the medium in which Hegel seeks to solve the problem that is the revolution is ultimately that of civil society. There might be arguments for this reading, but it remains, and Ritter clearly indicates this, too, unconvincing. Civil society as concept can certainly be read as a kind of answer to the question of how to realize a necessarily singular freedom in an also necessarily collective form and interaction. The problem is that it does not solve the problem of how to make this freedom actual for all.

Civil society is not an adequate organizational form for singular collective freedom to be realized, which is why inequality and structural violence keep resurging in it. This is in part because civil society, as capitalism in general, never solves problems. It simply invents new forms of how to delay dealing with them (colonies, for example). Civil society is, as Hegel demonstrates, inherently contradictory. These contradictions appear in the antagonism of the rich and the poor, and their respective rabble-types<sup>12</sup> and even the state is not able to resolve these kinds of contradictions (which is one reason as to why, in the end, even the state disappears in the ocean of history). For Ritter, this is a symptom that the problem that is the revolution is not yet solved by history and therefore could not have been solved by Hegel. Hegel's greatness consists, then, in having transformed philosophy into a theory of its own time. Because this is what being conditioned by the revolution means for philosophy: a new conception of and relation to time. The constitution of a new present, the present of the revolution, forces philosophy to reshape the constitution of time, e.g. its concept of time. Conditioned by the French Revolution, philosophy thinks its time by conceiving of what constitutes (properly historical) time—this is the eternal in the present. Ritter claimed that “there is no other philosophy that is

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ruda 2011.



a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel” (Ritter 1982, p. 43), but it is slightly oblivious of the grandiosity of its own claim after all, since it only detects its effects in the domain of objective spirit. He claims that Hegel’s thinking is conditioned by the revolution, yet he only traces in what way the problem that is the revolution conditions his political thought. There the problem remains a problem. Ritter does not account for what being conditioned by the revolution means for the sphere of absolute spirit and thereby he does ultimately not account at all for what it means for a philosophy to be conditioned by a historico-political event. He has no theory of conditioning.<sup>13</sup> Therefore it remains unclear how objective and absolute spirit are supposed to be mediated. But if this remains unclear, it remains unclear what is supposed by saying that Hegel’s is a philosophy conditioned by and thus a philosophy of the revolution, even though Ritter’s remark points in the right direction.

Jürgen Habermas has taken up Ritter’s reading of Hegel and modified what Ritter articulated as praise into a structural critique. It goes like this: the form in which Hegel endorses the French Revolution is what makes him part of the restoration. It is an example of what Adorno with Anna Freud called “identification with the aggressor” (Adorno 1993a, p. 37). Habermas states: “Hegel celebrates the revolution because he fears it” and “Hegel’s philosophy of revolution is his philosophy *as* the critique of the revolution” (Habermas 1973, p. 121). His point is that Hegel argues that the revolution is the world historical event in which abstract right is claimed in its universality for the first time, but – as his praise of Napoleon for Habermas indicates – he thereby ultimately argues that this was only part of an *evolution* of the concept of abstract right. Thereby what for Ritter appeared to be a new account of temporality and historicity, e.g., of philosophy’s

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<sup>13</sup> It should be obvious that I use the term following Badiou 2009a.

being-conditioned by non-philosophical practices, is for Habermas always already conceived against the background of a stable form of historical transformation, i.e., evolution. Hegel endorses the revolution as an element of an overarching historic-evolutionary process within which the former is in the last instance but a cog in the grand machine of history. Hegel thereby in advance sublates the revolution and through its very endorsement turns out to be the defender of a higher stability and order. Philosophy overcomes its own being-conditioning by what happens outside of it by identifying in it the sign of a grand scheme. Philosophy is therefore never conditioned by historical events in Hegel, but is rather a megalomaniac practice of *Belehren*, of instructing how to read conceptual signs. Hegel's ingenuity is that in his very endorsement of history he sublated historicity, in endorsing the revolution he opts for restoration, a tendency that Habermas detects in Hegel's philosophy of the state. Habermas's reading is problematic for a number of reasons that are not relevant to the present argument. But it is also crucial that he emphasizes how Hegel's very account of temporality and of philosophical practice gains an intelligibility and hence must be thought from the perspective of the historical event of the revolution, even though he sees in it a defence mechanism against it that is so defensive it dehistoricizes history itself.

Rebecca Comay formulates another option of how to conceive of philosophy's conditioning by the revolution. She emphasizes the fact, disregarded by both Ritter and Habermas, that in the *Phenomenology* Hegel's dissection of absolute freedom and terror is followed by a reflection on morality and ultimately on Kant (Comay 2011). She demonstrates how Kant is what people in Germany got instead of a revolution. This means that Kant's revolution of the way of thinking, is a way of philosophy being conditioned by the revolution. But it is precisely as Habermas sought to criticize Hegel for, a way of warding off the revolution by endorsing it. Kant is a defence mechanism against revolution

through its endorsement. As Comay shows, Hegel develops how Kantian morality can be read as an internalization of the terror of the French Revolution in the form of a moral law that does not stop demanding more the more we fulfil it. But this cannot but mean that whatever follows afterwards in the *Phenomenology* must be read as philosophy already thinking through the lens of the revolution. This is to say that even the revolution not happening (in Germany) will be thought through from the perspective of the revolution.<sup>14</sup> This is significant for the present purposes, because Comay thereby clearly indicates what it means that philosophy—the *Phenomenology* was for some time conceived as introduction to the system—thinks in the mode and through the eyes of the revolution.

Whatever is and also whatever is not is an effect of what happens. Even its concepts of being and not-being are thus a result of thinking from the standpoint of the (historical) event. In consequence this means that what happens in the transition from the *Phenomenology* into the *Logic* can be read as a depiction of a revolutionary act of creation—revolutionary in the sense of massively historical, namely the creation of a new “nature and a [novel] finite spirit” (Hegel 2010, p. 29). Hegel’s philosophy is conditioned by the revolution. Therefore he presents us with the immanence of the revolution, after depicting what it means to work through all our defences against it, including the endorsement of a revolution in our ways of thinking (Kant). Even a revolution in thought can serve as protective shield against history proper. But philosophy can also, and this is what Hegel’s *Logic* will do, enable a fully immanent perspective: *thinking in modus revolutionarii*.<sup>15</sup> This obviously does not mean that the problem

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<sup>14</sup> This is why for Comay the *Phenomenology* depicts an elaborate process of mourning running through all possible defense mechanisms by means of which we attempt to avoid revolutionizing.

<sup>15</sup> I began elaborating such a reading in Ruda 2019.

that is the revolution is thereby solved. But it indicates that thinking cannot avoid thinking in terms of incompleteness (and explore different forms of consistency). The French Revolution as problem is the purlieu not in- but affirming Hegel's thought. An *Umschlag*. Its condition and envelope. Like a historical letter. Sent and received.

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